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## **To Live: Fighting for Life on the Killer Mountain**

By Elizabeth Revol

**TO LIVE: FIGHTING FOR LIFE ON THE KILLER MOUNTAIN. Elisabeth Revol. Vertebrate Press (U.K.), 2020. Paperback, 160 pages, £24.**

In the winter of 2013, French alpinist Elisabeth Revol made her first attempt on Nanga Parbat, marking the beginning of a fateful and formative relationship with the “killer mountain.” She returned with Polish climber Tomasz Mackiewicz, first in the winter of 2015 and then again in 2017–’18 (Mackiewicz’s seventh attempt). On January 25, they completed the second winter ascent—and first by a woman—of the 8,125-meter peak, via a new route up the northwest face, which they had started during their first attempt together in 2015. But as all climbers know, the ascent is just half the story, and what follows is a heartbreaking descent and the nightmarish realities and choices the team must face. The descent, a harrowing ordeal of life and death, comprises the bulk of the story in *To Live*.

Highlights of Revol’s book include her exploration of and tribute to her friendship with Mackiewicz, despite their opposite natures, and his physical and spiritual obsession with Nanga Parbat’s slopes and stories. Her candor about the wide range of emotions she experiences help convey the complexity of climbing partnerships. Intriguing to all, regardless of climbing ability—and in many ways the most fascinating aspect of the book—are the sections where Revol delves into her motivations for climbing, especially such notoriously difficult objectives; the opposing forces of life and death that high-stakes, high-altitude climbing demands a climber to constantly juggle; and what has kept her climbing in the face of criticism, conflict, and tragic loss. Sometimes this is done through reflective prose and in other instances excerpts from personal journal entries. These insights help the reader better understand Revol and a drive that may be hard for some to grasp.

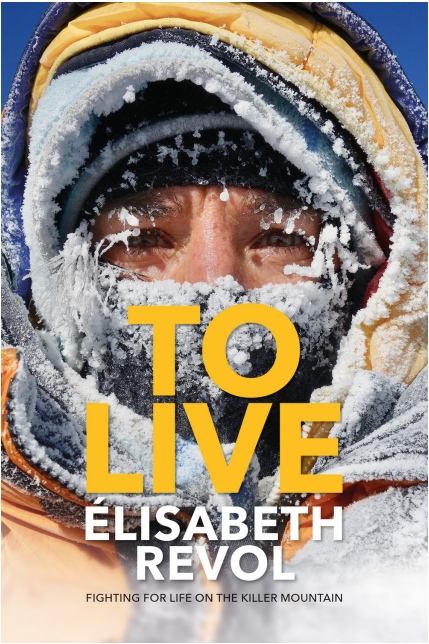
Also helpful are the copies of texts that occurred between Revol, her husband, and ground crews as a rescue was organized. Despite their sparse nature, these quick exchanges reveal volumes about the tense, terrible nature of the situations that adventure in the high mountains can create.

Similar to the opposing forces of life and death that climbers like Revol and Mackiewicz must balance, so too there is a fine line between self-sufficiency and the contributions of others that may be integral not only to success but also to survival. Details like Revol’s reliance on fixed lines set by a Korean team a year prior, and the Herculean efforts of the rescue organizers and climbers, including Adam Bielecki and Denis Urubko, add a layer of vulnerability that again deepens the story, as does Revol’s honesty around the trauma experienced in the aftermath of the climb.

Revol’s dedication, skill, drive, and passion for Himalayan climbing, in spite of all the tragedy she has experienced, shines throughout the book, as does her compassion for Mackiewicz and those who helped in his retrieval and her own rescue. The book concludes with a sampling of some of the existential dilemmas Revol faced in the aftermath of the climb, and the answers she eventually found would warrant another book. Just as we need more stories by competent woman climbers, so too do we need more ways to tackle not only hard routes but also these universal questions.

— Molly Loomis

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